



Drawn into Relationship, Guided into Truth **Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15** **Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (June 12, 2022)**

In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, the fox explains to the title character that becoming friends means "to establish ties."

In God's unsearchable wisdom, God has chosen to call us "friends" in Jesus. God desires an intimate relationship with us, one in which we get to know and love God, and, in the process, we get to know and love all that God has loved into creation, us included. The God of community (the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) calls us into community. Prompted by the Spirit of God, we are called into communion with one another; we commune at each other's banquet; we are fed by each other's kindness, companionship, forgiveness, and encouragement. We witness to one another the hope of life eternal in God.

This was Jesus' prayer in the Gethsemane, that all his disciples be one, and this is what the newly established Church understood of Jesus' (and, therefore, our) mission: the reconciliation of all creation in God.¹

According to Howard Thurman, evil and sin is life outside of community. In community, one receives "an integrated basis for one's behavior so that there is always at hand a socially accepted judgment that can determine for him when he is lost, when he has missed the way—that is, when he is out of community." This sounds a lot like Walt Whitman when he commented that we need to resist the "'will to quarantine' and to separate ourselves behind self-imposed walls. For this is why we were born: Men, all men (*sic*), belong to each other, and he who shuts himself away diminishes himself, and he who shuts another away from him destroys himself."²

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. agrees that God's creation is intrinsically interconnected "under the guidance of a personal God of love and reason who works for universal wholeness." A person becomes a person only in community according to Dr. King: An individual reaches the level of personhood only in social relations; a person grows and deepens through social relations with other persons.

For Dr. King, the cross of Jesus signifies a concrete shift in human history from revenge (alienation or separation) to compassion (integration or reconciliation). Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where people live together without fear.

The doctrine of the Trinity invites us to consider how a God constituted by relationship (the Father with the Son, the Son with the Spirit, the Spirit with the Father) draws us into that relationship with God and one another. Eventually, through the work of the Spirit, we come to

¹ John 17:21; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, and Romans 5:10.

² Cited in Matthew Fox, "Community and Interdependence," in Fox, *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing from Global Faiths*, pp. 85-88.

know our belonging to the Father and to Christ's body. And this reality is as true for the individual Christian as it is for small, local churches. Christians around the world are called and equipped to create the beloved Community of God: one, catholic (i.e., universal), and apostolic.

In his reflections on the nature of the Church, theologian and prolific author Miroslav Volf explores the necessary unity of all Christian churches. He writes, "It is true that a local church, even as a fellowship of mutual giving and receiving, could not correspond to the Trinity if it intentionally separated itself from other churches and did not seek communion with those churches; for the Trinity is precisely an open and inviting communion. If a church is open to other churches, however, it already corresponds partially to the triune God, just as by seeking communion with other churches it corresponds to the eschatological gathering of the entire people of God . . . and in so doing is actually a church in the first place."³ Being in community and sharing communion with other churches is a necessary aspect of being trinitarian Christians.

You will not find the word "Trinity" in the Bible to indicate the three Persons of God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This doctrine is extrapolated from various passages of the Bible revealing how God intervenes in the salvation of the world, including today's gospel passage from John.

Karl Barth notes: "The doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian...in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation."⁴ It's not something that can be explained away, not a puzzle to solve. It's a mystery to behold and like all mysteries, we stand in awe. Into that mystery we are invited like to a dance.

In such loving relationships, truth is discovered. We are encouraged to speak truth with love to one another for the purpose of growing into Community.⁵ But people cannot bear the truth all at once, so discipleship and faith formation are gradual processes of listening for the Spirit's voice. Christian practices such as worship, learning, and service are occasions for people of all ages to be "guided into truth." Such practices are rooted in baptism, in which God draws us into a lifelong relationship in which we grow into truth and love over time—guided by the Spirit, accompanied by Jesus, nurtured by the Word, fed at the altar, and having peace with the Father.

In Romans, we hear the truth of how love originates and grows in us: Poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, God's love gives us a hope that will never disappoint. The life of a Christian and growth in the Spirit is not without trials and tribulations. Life difficulties are not spared to the Christians. We walk in faith especially when we perceive silence from God and, in moments of darkness, we seemingly see no end to suffering. That's when we are confident and boast in the faithfulness of the Lord; that's when we remind ourselves that darkness may be a divine incubator for future spiritual fruits. Suffering can surely build endurance and character. In my suffering I can meet the redeeming cross of Christ.

Christian community is the living lab where we each experience our own growth in hope, faith, and love, and witness others' growth as they too are drawn more deeply into relationship with the triune God. Trinity Sunday offers the delightful opportunity to celebrate that growth.

May we allow ourselves to be guided into the truth of the mystery, and may we grow closer to each other and to God through Jesus in the Spirit. Amen.

³ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Eerdmans, 1998, p. 208.

⁴ *Church Dogmatics I/1*, p. 301.

⁵ Ephesians 4:15-16.25; John 8:32